

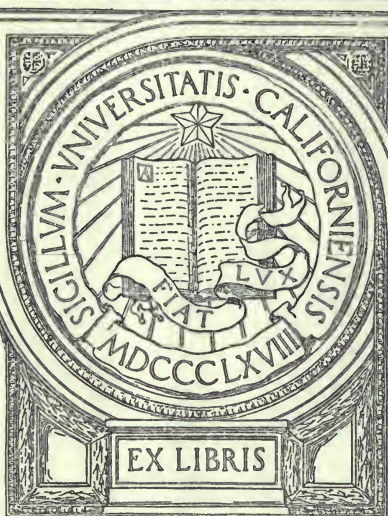
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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

MINISTERIAL PLAN

OF

REFORM.

BY

SIR JOHN WALSH, BART. M.P.

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OBSERVATIONS,

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SECTION 1.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Ministerial plan of Reform has now been submitted about four weeks to the House of Commons, and to the country. Until the last hour, its details and provisions were kept a profound secret, were unknown to the subordinate Members of the Government, and could not, therefore, have been previously weighed and considered by the public. Scarcely, however, was the measure explained and promulgated, than a great number of petitions in support of it poured in from various quarters. In many instances, in the more remote counties, the petition in support of the Bill was forwarded almost by return of the post, which brought it down. In all, the interval was a very brief one.

Few subjects which exercise the powers of human intellect, are more difficult and complex in their nature, more perplexing in their results, than the science of Government. As none can be directed to more exalted objects, involving as it does the happiness of our species, so none can be more abstruse in their character. Any great change in the Legislature, or form of Government, of a nation, must be a doubtful operation. The keenest political vision cannot precisely foresee its consequences. That this measure is of a very extensive description, will be allowed by all, since it is one of its merits most insisted upon by its supporters. The Members of the House of Commons who have given it their most anxious and earnest attention, are scarcely yet fully acquainted with its provisions and details; the Ministers who framed it have not, in the course of nine nights debate, attempted to afford any insight into its effects. It is certain, that the body of petitioners, in favour of this Bill, cannot have founded their approbation, by return of post, on any deliberate reflection, or any close analysis. It is no impeachment of their intelligence, to assert that they cannot yet fully comprehend it, and that their admiration must be a little according to the practice of the Baron in *La Fausse Agnes*, who tells us, “*Quand Je lis quelque chose, que Je ne comprends pas, Je suis toujours dans l’admiration.*” In this situation, called upon to support a measure changing the

whole British Constitution; which no one, a month ago, anticipated; called upon by those, who were then as unacquainted with it as myself, and who since have had less opportunity of informing themselves of it, I am tempted, in turn, to ask them to weigh my doubts and difficulties. I invite them to consider some of those reasons which induce my mind to reject what they desire. Without having the presumption to suppose, that, in a very short time, in a very hurried manner, and in the compass of a brief pamphlet, I can fully discuss this question, my object will be attained, if I can succeed in directing the intellectual power of the community to those channels which I cannot now entirely explore. Admitting, that a great number of petitions for the Bill indicate a strong feeling in its favour; an admission, which however I should be inclined to qualify, still their very precipitation proves nothing but feeling. It proves, that at the word Reform, its advocates, throughout the country, have rallied, like the Highland Clans of old, to the gathering cry of their chieftain; but, like them, with more of devotion to the cause, than of reflection upon its merits or its justice. But a measure of this nature, so far exceeding all that moderate reformers ever contemplated, must be tried not by the ebullitions of a hasty feeling, but at the calm tribunal of sober reason. We must not, in the intoxication or enthusiasm of the moment, pronounce prematurely upon a question,

which, beyond all others, demands the most deliberate exercise of the judgment. We must not, at this great crisis, forfeit that proud national characteristic, which regulates the warmth of English hearts and feelings, by the coolness of English heads.

SECTION II.

REMARKS UPON SOME ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT
OF THE BILL.

IN the course of the long debates which have ushered in this Bill, nothing is more remarkable, than that from the Ministerial side of the House so little should have been said about it. Its specific features must be allowed to be of a very marked character; and yet, with one or two exceptions, all the speeches, not merely of the general friends and supporters of Administration, but of the Ministry themselves, were arguments in favour of Reform in general, disquisitions on the state of public feelings and opinions, which might have been uttered as appropriately upon any other Reform as upon this.

Of these general arguments, there are one or two on which I am tempted to offer some remarks. It has been the anxious endeavour of the Reformers, to establish an analogy between the Catholic Question and that of Reform.

The points upon which they principally endeavoured to found it, were its being originally advocated by a very few; its gradual progress; its

being supported by what they consider the irresistible will of a great mass of society, and (a resemblance which they seek much to establish) its final success. To all these arguments one short observation is applicable, that in no science are arguments drawn from analogy less conclusive, than in politics. To give weight to an argument from analogy, the analogy ought to be perfect; exact in all its parts, similar in all its bearings; and as this necessary requisite is seldom attained in the infinite diversity of human events, and in the complex relations of national interests, all parallels of this nature must be admitted with infinite caution. Statesmen are not, like lawyers, governed by precedent. The innumerable different combinations of circumstances, constantly vary the data for our decision. It would be easy to shew many very striking differences between these two questions, which deprive such arguments of all their force. The chief and strong ground occupied by the long catalogue of great men, who successively advocated the repeal of the Catholic Restrictions was this. They argued that all the motives for the continuance of these restrictions had ceased; they pointed out that the temporal power, once so loftily and arrogantly claimed, and so insidiously exerted by the Roman Pontiffs, had faded into insignificance. The gradual increase of knowledge and civilization had imparted even to the sincerest and most devout Catholics, juster notions of the proper

limits of the spiritual jurisdiction. They shewed the convulsions of Europe in the French Revolution; the indifference even to religion, and certainly to all superstitious feelings, which that event had scattered through the States of Continental Europe, and they reasoned upon the improbability of that power being dangerous here, which had fallen into such entire weakness in all the seats of its former domination. Like the Turks threatening Christendom, it might formerly have been a subject of legitimate apprehension and precaution, which had now entirely ceased. They re-called to mind that their penal laws had been enacted, when a formidable Catholic Pretender to the throne, aided by the most powerful Sovereign in Europe, favoured by a strong party in the country, would inevitably be supported by every Papist in the three kingdoms. But the last of the Stuarts had died in exile, and the marble monument which records his end, was raised by the Sovereign who filled his forfeited throne.

Every motive, therefore, which originally prompted the enactment of these laws, had ceased by the course of time and circumstances. They had been themselves relaxed and modified at different periods, leaving but a small portion of their pristine vigour. They were still sufficient to draw an invidious distinction, to create a feeling of great irritation, although they no longer served the purpose for which they were passed. But is it to be inferred,

that if the daring political courage of Chatham—the firm hand of Pitt—the Statesmanlike genius of Canning—or the bold decision of the Duke of Wellington, had directed the affairs of State in the days of William or of Anne, they would then have consented to their repeal?

But, in the question of Reform, we have to deal with no visionary phantom of departed dangers, we are called upon to remove no ancient barriers against enemies who no longer exist, and which therefore may have become useless. The fanaticism of democracy, is in its full tide of life and vigour. The risks that we run in dealing with it, in compromising with it, are as real, and belong as much to this age, as the difficulties of Henry II. and John, from the Pope to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; or the dangers of George I. from the Pretender to the last.

Another view of this subject, a very ingenious and striking view of it, was brought forward by the Lord Advocate. It is, perhaps, somewhat too abstract and philosophical in its nature, to be exactly adapted to the House of Commons, and would be better suited to a literary essay. His theory appeared to be, that we are now arriving at an epoch of great change, that one of those mighty crises which occur in the history of civilization is at hand. Society, it is declared, is now in a state of transition, it has out-grown the institutions which were sufficient for its earlier days, it has wants and desires which are irrepressible;

it is moving in a course which we may guide, but which we cannot arrest. We are supposed to be in a sort of chrysalis state, but undergoing that transformation which is to supply us with new wings, to soar to a yet higher pitch of prosperity and happiness. The whole of this argument may be true, and yet the Bill of Reform the worst possible, since the means adopted to facilitate the transition, may be far too violent and sudden. I object to the whole doctrine, if applied to justify a Government in effecting great and immediate changes in national institutions. I can only subscribe to it as a ground of gentle and gradual modification. It may be a curious speculation of moral philosophy in the closet, to trace this working of a new spirit in the human race, and to measure the chances of its fermentation, eventually producing some great and novel benefits to mankind. But I contend that our faculties are too finite, and our experience too limited, to allow of practically shaping our course upon confused perceptions of an occult moral influence. The Statesman is not justified in steering his course on such metaphysical abstractions.—He must cling to certainties.—Who, for example, is to calculate whether this shock of conflicting principles in Europe is to be succeeded by a new impulse of improvement, or whether it is to shake the whole social fabric, and throw us back into disorganization and anarchy. Such a crisis may be at hand, but if so, I have not philosophy enough to contemplate such a

prospect without alarm ; I am not sanguine enough to look at it with hope. History teaches us that these portentous periods, happily of rare occurrence, are, to those who live in them, periods of great suffering and calamity. Social order cannot take an entirely new form, without wrecking the happiness of a whole generation in its fearful change. If, indeed, one of these great moral convulsions is at hand, we cannot hope to avert its progress. It belongs to greater wisdom to foresee, to greater power to direct its terrible course. We all hope for happiness beyond the grave, yet we recoil at the prospect of that dread change with instinctive horror and avoidance. The night of revolution may be succeeded by a bright aurora of prosperity and happiness, but it is beyond our ken, and probably it will never dawn to us. The very insufficiency of our faculties to calculate such stupendous results, renders it our plain duty, our clear interest, to avert such trials, if they can be averted by prudence, by temper, by policy, or by courage.

There have been great discussions and differences upon the word Revolution, and revolutionary, as applied to the Bill. It was contended that they were not only inapplicable, but extremely violent and exaggerated terms. It was argued that no measure could be revolutionary, which was effected without violence or intimidation, and in a legal manner. The word Revolution, in its first and strictest meaning, signifies a

turning round, as of a wheel upon its axis, and in a political sense expresses a complete change, which may be either in the form of Government, or in the whole frame and fabric of social order. But a revolution of the first description may surely be effected by the strictest adherence to legal forms, and violence is not at all necessary to constitute it. Were a Bill, abolishing the kingly office, and converting the State into a Republic, to pass the three estates, who could doubt, that it would be a Revolution? Now, not only do I think this Bill revolutionary, or having a tendency to cause revolution, but, in the first sense, as effecting an immense change in the Constitution of the greatest power in the State, I must consider it as a Revolution.

I have drawn a distinction between a revolution in the form of Government, and a revolution of the whole social system. Our own Revolution of 1688, was of the former character, the Commonwealth, and still more the French Revolution of 1789, of the latter. I at once admit that a revolution in the form of Government is not necessarily attended with general suffering to a nation.—It may be beneficial in its remoter consequences, without purchasing that benefit by great present distress and misery. A Revolution of the second description, however produced, whatever may have led to it, always must be one of the most fearful calamities which can afflict humanity.—It must rank with plague, with

famine, as one of those awful visitations of acute misery to his creatures, the explanation of which requires a fuller acquaintance with the great design of the Diety, than our limited faculties can attain. Every class of society must feel its dreadful pressure, and the lowest mechanic and labourer, whose subsistence depends upon the demand for his industry, must equally suffer. It lets loose all the worst passions of our nature, it overwhelms alike intellect and virtue, and it has this deep aggravation of its evils, that it brings all the coarseness, brutality, ignorance, and crime, generally confined to barbarous ages, into sudden collision with the refinements and highly wrought sensibilities of advanced civilization.

I have observed, that a revolution in the form of Government, does not inevitably entail this dreadful scourge, but it has always a strong tendency to produce it. The essential powers of Government cannot be transferred without so great a derangement of the interests and internal balance of a nation, as to incur the most imminent risk of a dissolution of the whole social system. We see, that France, where a Revolution of the first description took place in July last, under circumstances eminently favourable to the consolidation of the new Government, and the preservation of social interests, has nevertheless been constantly on the brink of one of the second order, into which there is much fear she will finally be plunged.

The very artificial state of England, the factitious character of her wealth, the maintenance of all her great interests upon a basis of credit, peculiarly liable to derangement from any political alarms, render it a matter of infinite delicacy to tamper with those institutions, in which the essential powers of the State reside. The existence of a formidable and active democratic party, bent on the subversion of Government, who have lately attained great influence over the minds of the middle and lower orders, give a doubly hazardous character to such attempts. The proposed measure appears to me calculated more to strengthen than to conciliate this party. I cannot think that it gives us the least security against fresh attempts, made with greater power and equal hostility against the institutions of the country. On this point turns the whole case, for and against the Bill.

I merely state it; subsequently, I shall endeavour to shew the grounds for my belief.

Reverting, therefore, to the controversy upon the expressions, revolution, and revolutionary, I have no wish to resort to any heated language, or to apply any exaggerated and declamatory terms in declaring my conviction.

First, that the proposed measure is, in the sense of the word, as applied to the form of Government, a revolution, as a complete re-modelling, and re-construction of the most important of the three estates must be considered.

Secondly, that in the sense of an entire subversion of existing social order, the measure is not in itself a revolution, but that it is highly revolutionary, as having the strongest tendency, and running the most imminent risk of producing that catastrophe. The first of these positions has never been discussed; it seems almost established by the admissions of the friends of the Bill; after all, it would be a mere verbal dispute.

The second is combated and denied, and upon it rest the merits of the question. It is, to use a military metaphor, the key of the Ministerial position; and if this position be shewn to be untenable, they are defeated.

I would close these prefatory remarks with one observation; that, in many instances, the approbation of the Bill may be much grounded upon, and mixed up with local views and interests. We all know, that the circle, which immediately surrounds us, is very apt to shut out the rest of the world. Without contemplating the sacrifice of the national to particular interests, the inhabitants of Wolverhampton, or of Brighton, may be attracted by the advantages to themselves, and disposed to think favourably of a Bill which adverts favourably to them. The freeholders, leaseholders, and copyholders of the large counties, the sober and respectable residents in open boroughs, who may have been disgusted with the riotous and tumultuary scenes of a popular election; all those in short who are personally affected,

may be disposed to consider that part of the measure which is confined to their own observation. I mean no imputation of selfish motives, I only allude to that natural disposition of men to give their attention first to what is nearest to them.

May all these remember, that this Bill must be considered in a wide and general view, that these localities sink into nothing, when compared with the great public results of this measure. I do not tell them merely, that private and partial views must entangle their judgment, which should exercise itself on the largest view of this case. I tell them, that the immense results of this step will bring home to their fire-sides consequences acting far more directly upon their most private and intimate interests, than any local effects it can produce upon them.

SECTION III.

DEFECTS OF THE CENSUS OF 1821, AS A BASIS
OF THE PLAN OF REFORM.

IN attempting to consider the new scheme of representation, with reference to that mixed principle of property, and population, on which, or rather on some vague approximation to which it professes to be founded, we are very speedily arrested by a formidable impediment. It is that we have no means of determining the amount, or the distribution, or the relative proportions, either of property, or of population. It so happened that His Majesty's Ministers acceded to office on three distinct pledges given to the nation, and declared, as the maxims of their policy, non-intervention with the affairs of Foreign States, great retrenchment of the public expenditure, and a Reform in the House of Commons. Now I believe that no custom can be more pernicious to the State, that nothing can be more injurious to the conduct of affairs, than for a Government to be trammelled by any pledges whatever. A Ministry should rest its claims to the public confidence upon known character, and tried ability, but it

should not be fettered in the difficult game of politics, by a prescribed line, which it may be unwise or impossible to pursue, amidst the constant shifting of circumstances and events. We cannot lay down certain rules for our guidance in an uncertain future. We must repose a large discretion, and guard against the abuse of it, by placing it well, and watching its exercise attentively. But these prospective engagements, these stipulations and contracts, are fraught with disgrace to the Minister, and injury to the country. It is said that the Austrian Generals could never hazard a battle without the permission of the Aulic Council, but Napoleon defeated both the Austrian Generals and the Aulic Council.

I really believe that many of the embarrassments and mistakes of the present Ministry have arisen from these self-imposed shackles. They have been unable to perform all that they had promised, and they have thought it incumbent upon them to perform, in the matter of Reform, more than was expected. They had promised non-intervention, and their intervention has been continued, and unlucky, even almost to the point of dispatching an armament to the Scheldt. They had promised retrenchment, and they added to the Army and Navy Estimates, and refused to adopt the recommendations of that very Committee for retrenchment of the Civil List, whose appointment had been the cause of their accession to power.

Their ignorance of finance, and their inexperience of the details and conduct of public business, had become apparent, and had shaken the confidence of the nation. In this very critical position they had no power to delay the question of Reform until they could procure for themselves, and for the House, the necessary returns and information, they had no choice between retirement, or proceeding to legislate upon this vital question, with the glimmering and uncertain light of former documents, extracted from the cobwebs of official Bureaux. We can make every allowance for the difficulties of their situation, but it is not the less a matter of regret for the country, that a subject, involving its national existence, should not have had the good fortune to be brought forward by an Administration strong enough to be gentle, cautious, and deliberate. We are not re-assured on entering this dangerous path, because we must tread it in the dark, and follow leaders who advance with the reeling, yet hurried step of desperate weakness.

In considering the unfairness and insufficiency of the data, on which we are called upon to proceed, we meet a thousand inconsistencies at every turn. On all sides complaints, well-founded complaints are made of partial injustice, of franchises taken from larger towns to be bestowed upon smaller ones; of large additions to the population and wealth of existing borough towns

having been overlooked, because they had extended beyond the limits of the ancient Borough.

The seeds of future discontent, of future change, are thus sown at every turn, and necessarily follow from the data which have been adopted. The basis of the new legislation rests upon an ordinary census of the population ten years old ! How many influential changes have not occurred in the course of those ten years ? How many towns have sprung into importance and commercial activity in that period ? How different is the state of property generally throughout the country ?

The scale assumed, contains an unavoidable principle of injustice within it. If the whole population advanced in an exactly similar ratio, if the wealth and the inhabitants increased every where at the same uniform pace, it would be a matter of comparative indifference, whether we adopted a census ten years or fifty years old. But as, on the contrary, nothing can be more unequal than this progress, so nothing can be more fallacious and partial than such a standard. It is worth remarking too, that the greatest practical injustice is sustained by those places, which have been the most thriving and progressive. Towns which have been stagnant, which have not distinguished themselves by industry and commercial enterprize, have less reason to complain, while those which have made use of their ten years to augment their wealth, their manufactures, and

where population has greatly increased in consequence, have a strong ground of remonstrance against the justice of such a course.

But this is not all that I have to allege against this census, as the groundwork of the Ministerial measure. Taken originally for no such great and important object, it is not only become already quite inaccurate by the effects of time, but originally it was wholly defective in that exactness and those details which would be required for such a purpose. A new, a complete, and a most elaborately classified census should have been the text book of this Bill. Before calling upon it to make so sweeping an alteration upon the basis of property and population, Ministers were bound to have submitted to the House the most precise and comprehensive statement of the manner in which that population and property are distributed. They should not have confined this to towns alone, we should have had spread before us the whole map of society, and we should have seen as clearly as figures could enable us to see, the various proportions and relations of the different classes of the community.

As it is, we do not know with certainty the population, or the proportionate increase of any one town from which we take away, or to which we add a franchise. We are called upon to reconstruct the House of Commons, in total ignorance of the materials we use, or of their adaptation.

to the purposes we are told to adopt. We are informed, indeed, that no symmetry or uniformity is intended, that Ministers have found anomalies, and that they have left anomalies, and it needs but a very cursory inspection of the Bill to confirm their assertion. The difference, however, is, that in the one case the anomalies had been created by time, and had been proved consistent with order and stability by experience. In the other, they are introduced without any apparent design, and are neither the result of any fixed plan, nor of the gradual working of circumstances. Ministers appear to have argued, that because our Constitution, though full of irregularities, had worked well, while the more regular and uniform systems of the continent had constantly failed, that therefore it was only necessary to introduce a large proportion of anomaly, at hap-hazard as it were into the new scheme. They seem to conclude, that provided they introduce something very heterogeneous, they shall infallibly succeed. I must totally dissent from this theory. I must be of opinion, that if we introduce innovations so extensively and suddenly, that our experience of the old system can no longer guide us in calculating the effects of the new, while we equally reject all adherence to uniform arrangement, we shall produce something, which will quite defy conjecture as to its mode of operation. I must frankly confess, that I believe we should have had a better chance of success, by adopting even one of those

continental plans *à la Sieyes*, of dividing the country into districts, and fixing some general qualification to a certain amount, than by this measure. As it is, we retain all the partial operation, all the inequalities and local defects of our present representation, while we entirely destroy the existing balance of various interests, which has enabled it practically to perform its functions.

SECTION IV.

VIEWS, AND POSITION OF THE MINISTRY.

IN considering political subjects, I have never been disposed to regard them through the medium of any party feeling. Whenever I have had occasion, either in writing or in any other manner, to express my opinions upon them, I have done so perfectly free from conscious bias for or against any party, or set of public men. I have sedulously avoided every kind of personal allusion, or discussion, and have been only anxious to place my own impressions in as clear a light as I could. If I find myself now compelled to deviate somewhat from this course, it is merely because I cannot possibly regard this measure in an abstract and insulated point of view, unconnected with the state of parties, and opinions in the country. I am necessarily obliged, in order to form my judgment upon it at all, to consider it relatively to those who have framed, and brought it forward. Their intentions, objects, character, and position, must enter into all our calculations of consequences.

The substance of the statements of His

Majesty's Ministers appears to be this. " We find
 " an appetite in the public, which must be ap-
 " peased. There is a demand, which cannot be
 " resisted, particularly by us, who have already
 " so often pledged ourselves to the measures
 " which they require. All that we can do, there-
 " fore, is to bring forward a plan, which shall
 " attain the two ends of satisfying the people,
 " and of preserving not only the great institutions
 " of the State, the rights of property, and legal
 " order, but that dominant influence of the Aris-
 " tocracy, which we ourselves, with all our love of
 " liberty, have a very considerable value for."--

Large as this measure may appear, it is offered as a compromise; and the argument of the Ministry is, that by removing the most unpopular features of the present mode of representation, they shall win back the alienated affections of a great body of the people, revive their regard to existing institutions, and in fact settle the influence of those classes, who now are most powerful in the State, on a more secure, and legitimate foundation.

If we could find an adequate guarantee for the security of the Constitution in the great personal stake which the Ministers, as individuals, have in its preservation, there can be no doubt that we might safely dismiss all anxiety upon the subject. The list of the Cabinet is peculiarly, and loftily Aristocratic. Of fourteen Members who compose it, ten are in the House of Lords, of the four who are in the House of Commons, one is the Heir Apparent

of a wealthy and distinguished Peerage, one an Irish Peer, and one a Baronet of very ancient family, and very extensive landed property. Nor do the other Members of Government present a less dignified catalogue of noble names. Every consolation which these circumstances can afford us, the certainty that if they do misconceive the consequences of their own measures, they will pay a fearful penalty for their error, we possess in a supreme degree. But we must take this comfort with some qualification.

As a body, with the exception of the followers of Mr. Canning, who do not appear to be the leaders now, they are totally inexperienced, and untried in the management of state affairs. The qualities of mind, the habits, the description of talent, requisite to perform a brilliant rôle in the ranks of an opposition, are very distinct from those necessary to a Statesman administering the affairs of a great nation. There is a certain tact of government, wholly different from the art of attack in debate. The present Ministers have had no opportunity of acquiring this by the education of office, and they have not yet shewn among them that native genius, which would enable them to dispense with previous training. We have not, therefore, in addition to the assurance which their own stake affords us, that confidence which in times of difficulty and danger we feel in seeing the powers of government wielded by hands of known and practised skill, directed by heads of

tried, and experienced ability. There is often so much of recklessness, and temerity, in those born to great advantages of fortune, that I should much doubt whether in fact prudence would be most generally found in its possessors. If a carriage be overturned, nobody runs a greater risk of being killed than the coachman, yet as, notwithstanding, carriages are often upset, I should not feel less nervous in being driven by an inexperienced whip, particularly if he were an amateur.

When we see the present Ministers startling the whole nation with the magnitude of their plan of Reform, we must admit that they have not as yet established that reputation for surpassing talent, as to induce us to surrender our own judgment and views of consequences to theirs.

To ardent and lofty spirits there is something in the excitement of party struggles, a little like that of the gaming-table; and those who have passed their lives in such contentions may acquire somewhat of the same disposition to risk much in the pursuit, and to stake the destinies of a nation with some rash reliance on fortune. The present Premier has justly obtained in his long public life the fame of great senatorial eloquence, of unvarying consistency, and of high personal honour, but that life has been passed, with a trifling exception, in the opposition. The duties and labours of office, the habit of conducting great affairs, have been quite foreign to it.

It is scarcely probable that now, in the decline

of his energies, advanced in years, and somewhat infirm in health, he should be able to acquire new modes of life, new habits of thought, and action. As an accomplished and highly gifted Nobleman, whose name is associated with the recollections of the brightest galaxy of talent that ever adorned our Parliamentary annals, Lord Grey will, while he lives, receive the willing deference and respect of his countrymen ; and when he is removed from us, will occupy no mean place in the history of his times. But that he should in his new character of Premier be entitled to that sort of entire confidence, which we only accord to a long career of successful Administration, is so far from being the case, that I should rather say his past life disqualified him from pretending to it. If he were now to make a very able, and successful Minister, he would be a most remarkable exception to the common rule of mankind.

It is quite incontestible that feelings of dissatisfaction, and discontent, with the existing order of things, both in government, and in society, have been widely disseminated among the lower and among the middling classes in this country. It is certain that sentiments of this nature have made a great progress, and have taken a formidable hold of mens minds within the last few months. It seems no matter of dispute, but an admitted fact, that among the lower orders generally, and among the manufacturing population, there is a considerable, numerically considerable party desirous of

the most radical changes, and who, if they do not use the word Republic, have tendencies entirely Republican. There is no doubt that this party is very strong in this country, that they have much organization, and concert, that they have principally possession of the public daily press, and that they have a few talented active organs within the walls of the House of Commons. But Ministers are not those organs.

On the other hand, among the possessors of property, and of affluence, among the best educated, and most intelligent classes, the greatest alarm, and aversion at these doctrines, prevail. Among a hundred shades of opinion upon political subjects, they agree in one great principle, that of resisting modifications of so extensive a nature, as materially to alter the English Constitution and social system. As old party designations become obsolete, and unsuited to new circumstances, they seem to have adopted that of the conservative party, which may express, as well as any other, the rallying point of their common creed.

The Ministry do not belong to either of these great divisions, and, in fact, represent no considerable body of opinion in the nation whatever.

If we adopt their own view of the matter, they are of the conservative party, they only profess to introduce innovations into a part, for the sake of securing the remainder. We may fairly take their own ground, and discuss the question with them upon its attaining this object. Their astounding

Bill of Reform has raised a popular cry in their favour, or rather in favour of the Bill; but they have not the confidence, and do not express the wants and wishes of the very persons who raise that cry. Who can doubt, that if one or two newspapers in wide circulation, if a small knot of gentlemen in the House of Commons, of very liberal politics, who take their seats on the Opposition side, had thought proper to decry this Bill as illusory, as aristocratic, as not giving the people what they petitioned for, the whole tide of feeling in the country would have been turned against it. It owes its popularity, not to those who brought it forward, but to those more accredited, more established leaders and directors of the popular spirit, who have thought proper to afford it their countenance and sanction.

Nothing is more short-lived or uncertain, it is true, than the tenure of that sort of influence upon the popular mind; but still it would be some security, if Ministers were, *pro-tempore*, in possession of it, and could express, with the voice of the people, as well as their own, that it would be generally regarded as a final settlement. But this they cannot do; and that very argument which they have brought forward as an evidence of the safety of the measure, namely, their own high and elevated station, is in itself a proof that they cannot be identified with the popular party. They are, exclusively, aristocratic; and those who have remarked the systematic attacks directed against

the aristocracy, will need no other demonstration, to shew, that they can only retain an influence over the democratic party by an entire abandonment of the interests of their own class. We must all recollect, that the Noble Mover of this Bill, and another distinguished Member of the Government, (one, indeed, who both in his own department, and in his place in the House, has given decided proofs of possessing highly promising talents,) have both recently been defeated in popular elections.

In considering the nature of the proposition they have brought forward, we must bear in mind that the Ministers offer it on the footing of a sort of compact, or compromise. They introduce this sweeping Bill on the pretext of modifying our Government so as to suit the altered condition of society. It is supported by two perfectly distinct parties: the Ministerial, who offer it as a permanent arrangement; and the various shades of popular, democratic, agitating, and radical, who accept it avowedly as a means of accomplishing ulterior objects. That these parties are quite separate, although temporarily united for a common purpose, is obvious. It is equally clear that they would be immediately opposed to each other, were the Bill, which is their only link, to pass. Our first and most natural question is, What is the relative strength of each? and, What will be their relative position should it be carried? Ministers deprecate ulterior changes, and declare

that they aim at getting the reasonable on their side, and thus being better able to deal with the unreasonable.

We must remember that they do not belong to the party they are desirous to propitiate, who think them very unreasonable in what they withhold, as we think them most unreasonable in what they give. It is to be apprehended, that in these two great divisions of national opinions, few will be left to think His Majesty's Ministers reasonable, except His Majesty's Ministers themselves. We must allow, that they are not tried and known Statesmen, that they are an experiment as well as their Bill, and that hitherto they have not established any claims to confidence with the thinking part of the people, or even to popularity with the mass by the general ability of their measures.

With these impressions upon our minds, we must proceed to discuss their plan, on the grounds of the two objects, which it is proposed to attain together.

1st. Will it satisfy the people?

2nd. Will it preserve society from convulsions? and more, Will it guard that existing ascendancy of the upper orders, which it professes to respect and uphold?

Ministers say, that it will do both; I say, that it will do neither. We have now, I hope, fairly joined issue upon these points.

SECTION V.

WILL THE PROPOSED PLAN OF REFORM
SATISFY THE PEOPLE?

I NOW ask whether it will satisfy the people? I do not mean merely whether it will allay for the time the feverish excitement which has lately prevailed; I do not mean, whether, appeased for the moment by a great and unexpected concession, the popular or democratic party will be contented to receive it, or will even joyfully accept it as a triumph, as a victory, and as a means of future conquests. I ask whether it has the character of a permanent, and satisfactory compromise. We have this difficulty, that on the part of the people such a compromise must be a tacit one. They cannot come forward collectively, and say, "We are content, and we faithfully promise on our side to revive the question no more." On the contrary, they have always the power, or their leaders have the power for them, of re-agitating it, whenever they think proper. The press, the most influential popular leaders, may begin again, whenever they chuse, to institute fresh topics of agitation, or to revive old

ones, and renew a game, which they have found attended with such extraordinary success.

I would remark, that this measure, though it may give the popular party more than they anticipated, yet does not give them by any means what they have demanded. Putting Universal suffrage out of the question, as not yet generally insisted upon, Retrenchment, and Vote by ballot, have been dwelt upon in almost every Petition which lies upon the table of the House of Commons. So little probable is it that these two points will be finally abandoned by the democratic party, that it appears difficult to restrain the expression of their desires upon them even while this measure is before the House, although every chance of its success must depend upon its appearing to give general satisfaction. The more influential leaders can only repress this feeling by pointing out that the present Reform is but a step, by a very short and certain road to the ultimate attainment of their objects, and that it would be impolitic to compromise it by startling the moderate and cautious by fully revealing them.

The new Electors created by this Bill, the £10. householders, are precisely that class who have most loudly called for vote by ballot, as a protection against the influence, unduly exerted as they conceive, by the upper orders. The pot-wallopers, the non-resident freemen, are little under the controul of this species of restraint, but

the small freeholders in the counties, and the resident shopkeepers and little householders in the provincial towns, are very differently circumstanced, and are the persons who have in fact called for it most determinedly. The present Bill, therefore, confers a vast increase of power upon a class of persons avowedly intent upon an important ulterior object, to which the supporters of the Bill are decidedly, and declaredly hostile.

I have instanced vote by ballot as the readiest, but not as the sole illustration of my position, that this measure will only be a commencement. But if we advert to the variety of popular topics, which have been so constantly before the public, the abolition of tithes, a great reduction of taxes, what is called an equitable adjustment with the national creditor, and a theory that the distress of the labouring classes is wholly owing to the unreasonably high rents of the landlords, and others equally subversive of existing society, we must conclude that Reform which does not settle any one of these questions, cannot set them at rest. These are all positive, and apparently substantial acquisitions; Reform is a mere theoretical experiment on the Government of the country. These demands have been distinctly brought before the House of Commons, and embodied in many of the Petitions which are so much dwelt upon as expressing the sense of the country. But in all the public meetings, in the speeches of popular leaders, and in the public papers, they

have been much more prominently brought forward. These are more faithful interpreters of the feeling of the day, than Petitions, which are always worded cautiously, and with a tone of respect and reserve. Now I do not believe that any man of sense, dispassionately considering the matter, can suppose, that having been long taught to view Reform as the means of accomplishing these objects, and finding in fact that it puts a vast increase of power into their hands, the democracy will abstain from exercising that power for the furtherance of them. Can we imagine that the party, the influential leaders, will stop in their career? that the public press will become silent, and inactive? Can we imagine that feeling, however the present Ministry may be the immediate agents, that they are the real authors of this movement, they will suddenly unite to arrest its farther progress? Is there any thing in their conduct, or language, to indicate such a change? Is it probable that all those motives of interest and ambition which govern, and have always governed such men, should yield to a rare moderation, a moderation not only sacrificing their known objects, but contradicting all their previous declarations to the present moment?

Or is it intelligible that their influence will be weakened by the moral effects of that very triumph, which, by all knowledge, and experience of mankind, will most contribute to strengthen and extend it? Who can doubt that the controul

of newspapers, and of popular leaders, would be immensely increased by the success of this Bill? It has been argued, that the very wide qualification which has been adopted is yet based upon property, that the poor artizan, or little shop-keeper, values his possession of £10. a year as much as the wealthy Squire or Merchant his £10,000. I will admit this argument so far, that I think this class would readily defend property against pillage, robbery, and violence, they would recognize those first interests of civilized communities, which enjoin the repression of open outrage. But I am so far from thinking that they would equally respect all the diversified rights, which have sprung up in our advanced and artificial society, that I am certain that six months would not elapse before they would begin to attack every one of the interests I have enumerated with all the force of popular opinion, and with all the additional influence in the legislature which this measure would confer upon them. I suppose it will be contended by the advocates of the Ministers, that attacks upon property are not attacks upon property if made through the organ of a representative assembly, and in conformity with the forms of the Constitution of the day, as they have already maintained that the measure itself would not be a Revolution, if it passes without open violence, and with an adherence to legal forms.

The only argument that I have heard for the

assertion that this Bill would satisfy the people, appears to me a peculiarly weak, paradoxical, and unstatesmanlike one. It is argued that this House has wholly lost the confidence of the country, while it is admitted that this is the consequence less of any fault of conduct, of any mischievous policy, than of the alleged unpopularity of its mode of election.

Now the supporters of this Bill affirm that its effect will be to restore this lost confidence, not by any change of measures, for they acknowledge that no change would be beneficial, not by removing grievances, or distresses, or diminishing taxation, for they confess that they do not see how these objects are to be attained, but by enabling them to preach patience and resignation to the country with more effect from the pure mouths of these regenerated Representatives. I will ask, if ever the institutions of a great nation were wantonly invaded, if ever an ancient and admirable form of government was changed, if ever the desperate risks of speculative innovation were incurred, upon so flimsy and groundless a pretext? We are to disorder the whole British Constitution, we are to endanger the very existence of social order, not with a hope, however illusory, that positive good may be attained, or that existing evils may be cured, but for the chance that the people may afford that credence to new Representatives, which they refuse to us. I must remain firmly convinced that this policy is wholly

mistaken, and that this expectation is palpably irrational. To indulge it would be to misunderstand the entire nature and course of popular movements, and miscalculate the force of the revolutionary current. I must believe that if a great portion of the population have been led to suppose that gross practical abuses exist in the government, that rents, that taxes, that tithes, that the national debt, that the influence and property of the aristocracy, are so many causes of misery, so many gross impositions upon the people, which Reform is to remedy, they will not be satisfied with a Reform, which leaves them all in *statu quo*. I do not acquiesce a moment in the doctrine, that the middling, and lower classes have a sudden and uncontrollable desire of political power on abstract principles, that they covet with such insatiable eagerness that imperceptible fractional share in the management of state affairs which a vote at an election would give them. I see that it is a matter of great indifference to them individually whether they have a vote for a Member or not. They have been taught to desire it as a means, not as an end ; and those who have taught them this lesson would take care to prompt them to use again the same means, and not to rest contented with so bootless a victory.

The very argument of the necessity of convincing the body of the people, at an immense sacrifice and risk, that there is little practical good to be effected, that the measure is an attempt

to persuade them of the truth of a position which the government themselves believe, is in itself an admission of deplorable weakness. It establishes the fact, that the government is controuled by influences within the country stronger than itself. The passing this Bill would increase these influences. If they are too strong for the Ministry now, they will be still more unmanageable hereafter. Even if the people, after having had their expectations so highly raised, were likely to sit down contented with this theoretical improvement, producing none of the effects they anticipate from it, still they would not be allowed to remain tranquil by those influences, which will more than ever direct and controul them.

The limits or design of this pamphlet will not allow me to go deeply into the details of this Bill. I will only observe, that the great inequality and partiality in the operation, the inconsistencies in the scale of population, and the thousand errors and difficulties, many of which we see now, and many more must we expect to discover, if so vast and crude a scheme is ever set in motion, will be inexhaustible sources of discontent.

The variety of new interests, at first unknown to the possessors, and only to be ascertained by contest, and by intrigue, would throw the country for a long time to come into a continual ferment, and would banish the idea of repose, or of the absence of excitation.

These very obvious reasons have satisfied me that this measure would not, and that it is utterly impossible that it should satisfy the people.

SECTION VI.

WILL THE PROPOSED REFORM SECURE THE REMAINING INSTITUTIONS OF THE COUNTRY?

I COME now to the assertion, that the Bill will not shake the essential institutions of the country, and will not destroy the influence of the higher classes, but only somewhat change its character. I confess I was surprised, shortly after the introduction of this Bill, to find impressions current among gentlemen friendly to it, both in, and out of the House, very different from those which I had immediately entertained of its highly democratic tendency. I was told in various quarters, "Oh! you do not understand the measure, you do not see its operation. It is a most Aristocratic Bill. The popular party may think that they have established a fulcrum for their lever, to overturn all the power of the Peerage, but they will find themselves mistaken: our order will be better and more firmly placed than ever. The influence of the highest ranks will be founded upon the most secure basis, and the discomfiture, and disappointment of the Radicals will be complete." I was more surprised, than

re-assured at the intelligence of this aristocratic ambushade. By principle, feeling, and education, attached, fervently attached to rational, and constitutional liberty, I should not view this Bill with less hostility, should I discover, that under pretence of satisfying the popular voice, it deceived while it fawned, and disguised an insidious encroachment of the powers it professed to curtail. One of the best arguments I know in favour of close boroughs, is, that they afford a field, a noble one for the fair play of intellect, and the free expression of thought, and that a private gentleman has through them an opening to declare his honest convictions, without subserviency to the dictation of one Peer, or of twenty thousand operatives.

But these hints induced me to examine and compare the aristocratic, and democratic parts of the Bill. It has certainly both tendencies. It gives something to both; but on casting the balance, I cannot find that it confirms the fond anticipation of my aristocratic friends.

The first decided accession to the democratic influence, is the proposed amputation of 58 or 60 Members. I think it will not be disputed, that the 168 seats which it is proposed to disfranchise, are filled by a class of Members eminently attached to all the existing institutions of the country. It is a matter of accusation against them, that they are too much attached to them, that they resist all change too stoutly. I will not now discuss that point, but it will be generally ad-

mitted, that no extreme or subversive measures are likely to be supported by them. They would not favour vote by ballot, or annual parliaments, or the spoliation of the fundholder, or the confiscation of rents. In opposition, their opposition would always be confined within the limits prescribed by the forms of the Constitution. Now, if these premises be admitted, it is quite evident, that if 168 Members be taken away, and only 108 or 110 added, even if that 110 be equally attached to the principles of legal order, equally firm to oppose those sudden gusts of popular excitement and error, which, unless a government has a power to withstand, it is built upon sand ; yet, that the relative proportion to that part of the House, more immediately subject to direct popular influence, is diminished. The reduction is about a tenth of the whole House ; and it is taken not generally from all parties, but from the number of those Members, who, whether in the Ministerial or Opposition sides, are, from their class, and the tenure of their seats, likely to unite in defending the great institutions of the country.

The next accession to the democratic weight, arises from leaving so many flourishing towns of the second class with only one Member, and adding only one Member to several great manufacturing towns. Every one who has had opportunities of observing the working of popular elections, must be aware, that those little communities, those little separate states, as it were, the

provincial towns, are all divided into two parties. They have their blues, and their independents, the first attached to existing institutions, the second desirous of great innovation and reform.

Were a traveller to traverse all the country towns at the time of a general election, he would see pretty much the same scene in every one. The parties, the mottoes, the devices, would be the same in all. Here would be a set of blue banners with Church and State, Thompson and the Constitution, there a set of orange or green with no taxes, no tithes, Smith and cheap bread, &c. &c. Now some principal wealthy tradesman or manufacturer, canvassing for Mr. Thompson, and going to John Dobson, the carpenter, a £10. householder, would say, “Dobson, I hope you will
“vote for my friend Mr. Thompson; he is a most
“respectable gentleman, and every way a fitting
“representative of this Borough.” To which John Dobson replies, “Why, Sir, Mr. Thompson is a
“very civil gentleman, and I like his looks vastly;
“but then, here is Mr. Smith, who is so fond of
“cheap bread, and so am I, and he hates taxes;
“so do I, therefore, I really think I must vote
“for Smith.” “Nonsense,” cries the tradesman,
“you are not so foolish as to think Dobson, that
“if Smith were made Chancellor of the Ex-
“chequer to-morrow, he could perform all these
“fine promises. But, Dobson, you have two votes;
“give one to Smith and his cheap bread, and
“give the other to my friend, Mr. Thompson; for

“remember, that it was owing to me last winter
“you had any bread at all.”

This sort of compromise, which I have attempted to shew by a familiar instance, takes place very generally throughout the kingdom, between the influence of the upper classes, resident in country towns, and the numerical majority of the lower. It ends, for the most part, in each returning a Member, whose opinions assimilate to their own. But it is evident, that with one Member, no such arrangement is practicable. Party spirit will be more violent; there will be a struggle every where, between what I may call the aristocracy and democracy of the middle orders, and in the sixty-four Boroughs, which would, under the new arrangement, return one Member only, a great preponderance would be given to the spirit of pure democracy. I will offer some remarks here upon the qualification which has been adopted. We have been fatigued with desultory harangues and general declamation about the middle orders. We have been told, unceasingly, of their increased wealth and intelligence. The Ministerial arguments seem one constant appeal to that class. I confess, it appears to me, that they have the very loosest and most inaccurate ideas of those orders, for whom they profess so profound a respect. It is not wonderful, that, contemplating this division of society from the lofty eminence of their aristocratic elevation, many shades and gradations

in it should have escaped them, quite apparent to nearer observers. The liberality of the great leaders of the Whigs has ever been of a peculiarly abstract and speculative character, dealing much in generals, but little marked by any unusual affability and urbanity of demeanour, or by any cultivation of social and kindly intercourse with less distinguished ranks. I admit, and admit with that pleasure with which I shall ever observe, the real improvement of my country; that a great advance has been made, of late years, in the acquirement of knowledge, and in the mental cultivation of a considerable portion of those ranks. Among the opulent shopkeepers in London, among the respectable retail dealers in the provincial towns, among the superior class of yeomen and farmers, I have met, very generally, a degree of intelligence and information, not merely confined to their own business, but embracing a more extensive range; I have observed a facility of language, and a propriety and correctness of thought, which denoted a considerable share of education and refinement. If these persons really have a very eager desire to possess votes for the return of Members to Parliament, I should certainly not be inclined to throw any obstacle in their way. But I contend, that Ministers have, in their measures, exercised no discrimination. The qualification they have adopted, will have the effect of introducing, not this intelligent and educated portion of the middle

ranks alone, but a vast majority very differently endowed. The motives for this low qualification were explained to be, that, in many of the Boroughs, retained or added by the new scheme, it was found that a higher rate would give too small a number of electors. But is not this rather an argument against adopting a uniform qualification at all? It merely shews, that the same scale will not suit Calne, and Birmingham. I am sure, that to no portion of the community would this measure be practically more unsatisfactory, than to that valuable part of the middle classes, who would be thus confounded with those so much their inferiors both in attainments, property, and station in society.

The next element of democracy is the transfer of the franchise to the large towns, chiefly manufacturing, in England, and to the great suburbs of London, in all forty-four; in Scotland and Ireland to fourteen more; all these returned by electors, voting according to the very low rate of qualification fixed upon, and in which no aristocratic or permanent influence of any kind can be supposed to exist. This is another tenth of the House added to the democratic scale. The throwing open the right of voting from the corporations to the £10. householders in towns like Bath, Bury St. Edmonds, &c. is of course another transfer of power to the democracy, exactly equivalent to that of a close Borough to a large town. As many of these as are to be found in the list

of the House of Commons, may, therefore, be fairly added to the sixty proscribed Boroughs. In counties, the addition of the copyholders and leaseholders will, unquestionably, add some weight to the popular scale. It is impossible to examine and enumerate all these additions to the democratic influence in the State, direct, and indirect, without arriving at the conclusion, that the change in our Government is even more vast and comprehensive than the first view would have led us to suppose.

It would also be an inevitable result of such a construction of the House of Commons, that even where the same individuals are returned, they would hold their seats by so frail a tenure, that all independence of opinion would be destroyed. The popular voice and will would have so overwhelming a power, directed by the press, to bear on any point, that the House would become the mere organ of its wishes. It would be an assembly of delegates. The constitutional doctrine now is, that a Member is bound to vote according to his own best judgment, subject to being displaced by his constituents, if his conduct does not please them. But in practice we find that this stoical firmness of purpose is subject to great relaxation; and, at any rate, the conscientious representative would be displaced by another of more congenial sentiments, or of a less scrupulous character. If this will of the people be always perfectly wise, right, and

proper, if they always direct their representatives, by a gentle violence, into the best possible course of policy, I have no farther doubts of the excellence of this plan of Reform. My only remaining difficulty will be, how a population, so perfectly competent to act for itself, can require any representatives at all.

The aristocratic features of this Bill consist - First, in the line of disfranchisement which has been adopted, with reference to the population, and size of the towns. Secondly, in the addition to the county representation of fifty-four Members to the twenty-seven largest counties.

With respect to the first, it seems rather a reservation of some portion of the existing influence of the aristocracy, than any addition to it. It can only add to it in a few cases, where a numerous body of non-resident freemen are exchanged for a smaller and more manageable set of £10. householders.

The influence of the aristocracy in elections is of two kinds; one, where the Borough is entirely close, the other, where a large property, in a moderate sized town, and residence in the neighbourhood, with the obligation and patronage of tradesmen it gives, and a great command of money create a preponderance which other candidates are not disposed to contend against, on a mere chance of success. A large number of the Boroughs would consist of towns of this calibre and description, containing three hundred

£10. householders, or made up to that number by the neighbouring parishes. In all these Boroughs the aristocracy would, of course, seek to establish, or confirm their influence. A place of this size, and voters of this class, are peculiarly open to every species of illegitimate influence; and we might expect, throughout them all, a vast increase of bribery and corruption. The kind of influence too, is exactly of that nature which is most unpopular and obnoxious in its exercise, and the most opposed to the present temper of the people; and we might be prepared to see multiplied, throughout the country, the disputes of Newark, Shaftesbury, and Stamford. I would observe, that the sort of weight to be obtained in this manner, can only be obtained by the highest and greatest aristocracy. Towns of this size can only be swayed by the powerful influence of very great wealth, added to that of hereditary rank and station. All minor interests would be swept away. The result then would be to reserve, and, perhaps, in some instances, to confer upon the highest and richest of the Peerage, or those great Commoners, who are on a level with them, a power of returning representatives in several of these small Boroughs. This power would be very precarious, constantly open to attack and intrigue, and it could only be maintained by the general adoption of those means, which have already, in a few instances, created so strong a feeling of hostility to the aristocracy,

and which must always be extremely revolting, and unpopular. The same tendency may be observed in the additions to the county representation, and in the divisions of the counties into districts, thereby adding to the local influence of great estates. The large and remote counties are, it is well known, the strong holds of the great landed proprietors. In the small counties, estates are more divided, and overpowering influence less known. But in the more distant, and greater counties, we find the baronial halls, the princely domains, the unbounded hospitality of the proud and lofty nobles, who have, down to our days, preserved, in a more modern shape, so much of the greatness of their feudal ancestors. I acknowledge then, that in this sense it is an aristocratic, and a highly aristocratic measure. All that it does not give to pure democracy, it disposes of in favour of the highest and greatest of the Peerage, and landed proprietors. The intermediate ground is entirely swept away. All those avenues opened to the honourable ambition of the less distinguished gentry would be closed for ever. The most independent, perhaps the most enlightened portion of the British people, could no longer approach a place, which has so often been adorned by their talents, and where they have rendered such services to their country.

Two paths alone would be left to the entrance within the walls of the British House of Commons; one, the canvassing of a large provincial town, the

intrigues of years perhaps, the gradual coaxing an interest ; sometimes, alas, by humouring popular delusions, by inflaming popular passions, by lending oneself to the wildest exaggerations of popular prejudice. On the other hand, by the possession of the highest rank, by great and concentrated landed estates, by advantages to which men must be born, and which the exertions of a life, however active, however meritorious, however successful, could never attain. I do not deny, that if I thought my country's welfare demanded the sacrifice, the political annihilation of the private gentlemen of England, I should feel a deep regret. But, I believe, that their interests are identified, and that the blow which destroys this valuable class, would inflict a vital wound upon the nation. And let not this proud Ministry suppose, that they would eventually triumph, or that they could blend together two elements so discordant as the flood of democracy, which one part of their Bill introduces, and the exclusively and loftily patrician character they have given to the other. Let them not imagine, that the frail ark they have constructed would bear their Whig Aristocracy, unharmed amidst the waters of such a deluge. All that now renders the House of Commons a complete amalgamation of different interests would be lost. Now we neither see manufacturers nor agriculturists, nor monied men, sitting apart or acting separately. There is a fusion of all in that mighty crucible, into one great national interest. Should

this Bill pass, the first question which arises, bringing the interests of the aristocracy into collision, not only with the interests, but with the prejudices, or caprices, or passions of the multitude, would be the signal for complete separation. The aristocratic part of the House, exclusive, lofty, insulated, and obnoxious, would be assailed by the whole concentrated power of the popular party, both within and without. Numerically inferior to their opponents inside, and overwhelmed by the cry, which those popular leaders would easily raise from without, is it possible, that this feeble rampart of the Monarchy could long resist? And how long should we wait before some such question would be started? Are not vote by Ballot—a completely free trade in corn—or such retrenchments as would render the payment of the national debt impossible, ready made to their hands?

I believe, that the framers of this Bill love their order; when I look at it, I see that they love their order, but I see too that they love it “not wisely, yet too well.”

SECTION VII.

IRELAND.

IF I perfectly agreed with the Ministry upon every other part of their measure—if I thought its details admirable, its objects most desirable, and its provisions best calculated to attain them—if I considered every other danger chimerical, and the benefits it would effect as substantial, and extensive, as the most sanguine of their supporters—its effects upon Ireland would be sufficient alone to determine me to oppose it. In the present state of that country, in the consequences of the Bill, as it applies to it, and in the general position of the two nations, are to be discovered grounds of objection, calculated to neutralize, or to counterbalance, every possible advantage from it, even had these advantages a real existence. The state of Ireland is critical and disquieting in the highest degree. The arguments which have been most strenuously urged in support of Reform in England, do not apply to it, in the least. There are a thousand motives, on the other hand, to render interference, or alteration of the existing mode of representation in that country,

(particularly such alterations as are proposed,) dangerous, and impolitic in the highest degree, and menacing to the very existence of the empire.

First, the reasons brought forward with respect to England, are inapplicable to Ireland. Two thirds of the Members returned to Parliament, are from the counties; the large towns are generally open. The close boroughs do not bear such a proportion to the whole, as to render the anomaly a very striking feature, as respects the representation of that country.

The strongest ground occupied by the Reformers in England, was the absurdity and inconvenience of leaving such places as Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham, without Representatives. But, in Ireland, no such great manufacturing towns have sprung up; and although it has been judged proper to propose an addition of five Members to the borough representation, (for what reason, heaven knows,) yet, as no place of importance, already unrepresented, offered itself, in favour of which to dispose of these additional Members, they have been conferred upon five towns, which, according to the articles of Union, were already represented. In England, the view which has been most fondly dwelt upon, has been the increase of wealth, the acquirement of intelligence, the independence and progressive advance of the middle orders; but, in Ireland, it is the great evil and misfortune of that country, that this necessary and important link in the social chain,

is almost entirely wanting. The best, the most substantial and educated of the middle orders, are the Protestant tradesmen, resident in the towns; and these are precisely the persons whom the provisions of this Bill would cut off from all influence and controul in elections whatever. In England, it is unquestionable, that a great eagerness and desire for Reform, have taken possession of the minds of a large part of the population; but, in Ireland, although easily excited, and directed by those to whose suggestions they implicitly defer, to ask for any thing, the great mass of the people are, in themselves, far less interested in the question. In England, it has been constantly urged, that the advanced civilization of the nation, the different proportions and distribution of property and intelligence, required a corresponding change in the institutions of the State; but, in Ireland, the most marked characteristic of the mass of the population is a backwardness in civilization, as compared with the rest of Europe. That kind, and generous, and warm hearted people, whom it is impossible to know without feeling regard and affection for, as they have the natural impulses, the primitive feelings, all the virtues of an early and rude stage of society, so they have the defects, the uncontrollable passions, and much of the ignorance, and want of information, which are also its inseparable concomitants.

The state of Ireland, for some time past, has

attracted so large a share of the public attention, that it is wholly unnecessary to enter into any lengthened detail of it. We all know, that the mass of the population, in three fourths of that country, is Catholic, and that the bulk of the property, and, we may add, the education and refinement, is Protestant. It is an unhappy, but too probable consequence of such a state of things, that a strong line of demarcation should be drawn, and a feeling of hostility engendered between the followers of the two religions. If it does not inevitably create fierce party differences, at least it prepares all the materials for them, and renders their growth rapid, and their extinction, when once they have sprung up, difficult. In many of the continental nations, the two faiths flourish amicably, side by side, and their existence does not in the least disturb the general harmony. But, this is very frequently, a result of that indifference to all forms of worship, which extends over a great part of Europe. The French have little religious feeling, and no superstition or bigotry whatever; at least, the only bigotry they are disposed to indulge, is a bigotry against the professors of religion. The devout Catholics and Protestants in these countries, are rather drawn together by the presence of this common enemy of both. They are more inclined to sink their differences, and to cultivate those sympathies and points of agreement which exist between them. The tranquil and specula-

tive character of the Germans, and the care with which a perfect toleration has been cherished in their States, explain the fellowship of the two creeds in that country. Generally, from the diffusion of information, from the fusion which has taken place among different nations on the continent, from the effects of the writings of the French Encyclopedists, and from the whole public mind having been fixed upon political doctrines and struggles, it is indisposed to entertain warm, or party feelings upon any distinctions of faith. But, Ireland is circumstanced very differently; it has been quite out of the sphere of operation of all these causes; the rude and simple character of its peasant population, their being undivided by any gradations of ranks, the influence of a priesthood, (extremely zealous and exemplary, like all the Catholic parochial and secular clergy, in the duties of their profession,) have preserved here much of the attachment to their creed, and reverence for its Ministers, which we should vainly seek in France, or in Italy. In the course of long and bitter struggles, religion has been made a point of honour and a badge of party; it was the standard under which, in the contentions which immediately preceded the settlement of the Catholic Question, the power of opinion, and the force of numbers were ably organized and concentrated. They were so organized and concentrated for a successful purpose, and the discipline and machinery which had had the credit of accom-

plishing it, was rendered familiar to men's minds, remained unbroken in the hands which had formed it, and convertible to new objects.

It might have been possible, that, upon the passing of that Bill, the authors of those formidable combinations, which, if they did not cause, certainly facilitated its triumph, might have themselves dissolved them, might have lent their great aid to promote the beneficent aims of the best friends of Emancipation, and might have sought to tread in the new and loftier path, which had at length been opened to their talents and their ambition. But, Washingtons are extremely rare; and it was a more tempting game to continue at the head of the system of agitation, and to supply a new object for its energies and exertions. The Repeal of the Union succeeded the Catholic Question, with this difference between them, that in the Catholic Question the Agitators were united with half England, with its best Statesmen, with a great portion of its intelligence; and that in the Repeal they stood alone, at the head of their bands of Agitators, in direct opposition to the whole sister nation, and to all the property of their own.

I should scarcely have alluded to a state of things so well known, but for the purpose of vindicating myself from any imputation of intolerance, in objecting to changes in the representative system of Ireland, calculated to strengthen the influence of the lower Catholic

population. It is not as Catholics, it is not as professors of a religion differing from my own, that I object to them; it is, because I know that they will be instruments in hands which I distrust, for the promotion of purposes which I dread. If half the Protestant County Members in Ireland had been turned out by Catholic Gentlemen, possessed of equal estates, property, and consideration, in their respective counties, I should have regarded it as a matter of total indifference to the empire. But when it appears that any individual, or set of individuals, have sufficient weight and influence, by a sort of freemasonry of sect, by the mere force of their recommendation, by that moral controul over the Catholic freeholders, with which the circumstances of these religious struggles have invested them, to procure the election of persons, as Members for Irish counties, totally unconnected with them by any local ties, there is no mixture of intolerance in the apprehension which such a state of things creates. So formidable, so unprecedented a power of dictation, coupled with the avowed determination of exercising it to accomplish the Repeal of the Union, must be a source of anxiety to all reflecting minds. The state of affairs in Ireland must be perpetually present to the thoughts of the Ministry. The course of agitation, within the last few months, has excited their utmost exertions to repress it; in the form in which it has lately been displayed,

of constant meetings, and inflammatory harangues to assemblies of the people. Can they be blind to the yet more serious character it assumes, in this interference with elections, and in this power of nomination which it seems to possess; as absolute, for the time, as that of the proprietors of Gatton, or Old Sarum? Even now, is it not confidently whispered, that they would not have been disposed to trust their favourite Bill to the farther discussion of a House, which had allowed it to pass to its most critical stage only by a majority of one solitary voice; but that the consequences of letting loose this terrible force of excitement and influence, have made even their temerity pause? When the existence of a party so formidable, that they occasion a dissolution of Parliament to be dreaded by the rashest as almost a convulsion of the State, is a notorious fact, how must that policy be characterized, which, gratuitously, causelessly throws a vast additional weight into its hands?

The increased powers confided by this Bill to the hands of the Irish agitators for the Repeal of the Union, are derived from these resources:—

First, the reduction of the English Members in the House of Commons.

Secondly, the increase of the Irish.

Thirdly, the laying open twenty-five or twenty-six boroughs, and transferring the right of voting from the Protestant corporations to the Catholic £10. householders.

No reason has ever yet been assigned for the first two provisions. They are among those parts of the Bill, which, as Lord John Russell stated to the House of Commons, required no argument in their support, as they spoke for themselves. They do speak for themselves, but they appear to speak a different language to different minds. They give a large accession of weight, both positive, and relative, to the Irish representation in the House of Commons, which was uncalled for, which was unexpected, which was not conceded to any popular demand, and which is diametrically opposed to the true policy of the British empire.

But as if this were not regarded as bestowing enough upon the agitators, as if it were considered not sufficient indirectly to add to their importance, by depressing England, and raising Ireland in the scale, Ireland, the seat of their extraordinary power and authority over a large portion of the constituent body, a more positive donation must be made to them. Twenty-five, or twenty-six boroughs, a quarter of the Irish representation, are beyond their controul, are quite exempt from the sphere of agitation, are returned by that interest, which is the interest of property in that country. These boroughs are a counterpoise to their dangerous ascendancy, and these boroughs must be surrendered to them. Who can doubt that the Catholic £10. householders in the towns will act as the Catholic

£10. freeholders in the counties do? Who can suppose, that if they do not obtain possession of all these Boroughs, they will not at least render every one a focus of restless intrigue, and perpetual excitement? It is as certain, as it is that the Protestant Corporations would continue to maintain the Legislative Union, the rights of property, the authority of law, and the permanence of social order.

Well might the Honourable Member for Waterford support the Bill with more than even his usual ability, and with much more than his usual moderation.

But, agitation in Ireland has for the moment been suspended, and it is even remotely hinted, that the Repeal of the Union is a means, not an end, and, that it is possible, that if Reform works miracles for the relief and benefit of Ireland, the Repeal may be relinquished. So is the demand for Vote by Ballot hushed, so is the loud call for Retrenchment silenced, so are the hundred ulterior objects of the democratic party for the moment deferred. But, I would ask the Statesmen, who direct our affairs, what part of the conduct of the Agitators in their transactions with them, has given them such confidence in their moderation, that to them of all others are large concessions to be made without security, and new powers reposed with such unbounded trust, not in their pledges, but in these dark hints of possible change of views?

One remark suggests itself upon this subject, that whatever accession of strength the agitation party receives within the walls of the House of Commons, it will unite itself with the democratic English party against the settled institutions of the country. A Government, to possess stability, must be stronger not only than one party, but than all combinations of different parties; for, however opposed on other points, they will always unite to overthrow it. And in the lamentable course of these popular movements, the most extreme party has always the best chance of triumphing in the end, partly because *vires crescit eundo*, partly because while it is gaining and maturing its own strength, it fights with the force of all the other more moderate, added to its own. When a Ministry is overthrown by one compact party of different opinions, it is a much less evil to the country, and much less disquieting to the lovers of settled government, than when it is overthrown by a union of different ones.

For, in the latter case, whatever Ministry succeeds, will have the same disadvantages to contend with, and will equally want the character of permanence.

Time is measured by events; and in the course of the last few months, events have crowded in upon us with such rapidity, that those of very recent occurrence scarcely retain a place in our memory. Yet, there was a declaration, made by Lord Althorp, but a few weeks since, which, as it

made a strong impression upon his hearers at the time, cannot have been altogether forgotten. It was, that of his determination, rather than consent to the Repeal of the Union, to support the last dread alternative of a Civil War.

The known humanity and kindness of heart which distinguish this Nobleman, must have rendered such a determination a painful one. He could not avoid picturing to his fancy the dreadful scenes with which such a war would infallibly be marked. He could not but feel the deep aggravation of the evils of war at all times, when it is waged between fellow subjects and countrymen, when it vindicates no national honour, and promotes no national interest, when the widows and orphans it makes are consoled by no patriotic feeling, and when victory itself is but a negative and a joyless triumph. And a Civil War in Ireland ! He could not have concealed from himself its appalling prospect—a wild, an excited, an uncontrolled peasantry, rising in an ungoverned mass, subject to no command, but that of the most desperate among themselves, and directing their fierce attacks against all that the country contained of property, and rank, and station. He must have anticipated all those horrors of warfare, happily now banished from the practice of civilized nations and regular armies, except in the short intoxication of a successful storming party. Against such horrors desolating the whole country in so irregular a struggle, the sole weak security

would be those better impulses, which might soften the passions of lawless and fierce spirits. He knew it was a war in which private property, and sex, and age must incur one common danger ; that it was a war which might be stained with cruelty, disfigured with crime ; that there would be no refuge for the defenceless in the courtesies of cultivated minds, or in the recognized usages of civilized nations. He knew, that this war could only be extinguished by the blood of many unhappy, mistaken, yet ardent and gallant men, poured forth in a melancholy contest with that disciplined British valour, which was formed on nobler fields. He knew all this, and yet he made his election rather to encounter it, than to consent to a measure in which he saw the ruin of the British empire. I do not blame his determination, I do not impeach his judgment ; it would be a sad alternative ; I firmly believe, it would be a right and a proper choice. But did he weigh all the responsibility which that declaration attached to him, when he gave his consent to this Bill of Reform ? Can he quite reconcile it in his own breast, to give additional power by his Bill to those, whom he is prepared, if necessary, to repress by the bayonet ? We cannot dive into the secrets of Cabinet Councils ; we know not the negotiations, or compromises, which the Ministers of the King of England, may have judged it consistent with their dignity, and his, to enter into. We are ignorant of the value of the securities

they may have obtained, or of the grounds of the confidence they may place in them; but we know this, that if the great increased influence given by this Bill, to those Gentlemen who have lately agitated Ireland, to procure a Repeal of the Union, be further employed for the same purpose; and if human blood be ever shed in opposing it, His Majesty's Ministers will not only have the mortification of a great political blunder, but they will have prepared for themselves a source of deep and lasting remorse.

SECTION VIII.

THE STATE OF EUROPE.

THERE is a certain class of politicians, who ask, “What have we to do with the Continent? What have Foreign States to do with us? Let us not intermeddle in their affairs, but confine our attention entirely to home; we have nothing to do with them.” These politicians will not be inclined to follow my views, in considering the effects of this Bill of Reform upon the general destinies of Europe. I cannot, however, reject this consideration of the subject, because I can only coincide in their opinions to a very limited extent. I agree with them, so far, as to regard a meddling busy interference with the internal affairs of other nations, without great and adequate objects, as a mischievous and mistaken policy. It would be equally mistaken in France or in Russia. It is exactly analogous to the conduct of an officious busy body in private life, a character in which there is certainly neither dignity nor wisdom, and which is of all others the most likely to entangle a person in awkward scrapes and embarrassments. Let our interference be sparing, be judicious, be

only exerted for worthy national objects. But, this is only a just general principle, which ought to govern the conduct of all great States. If these gentlemen mean to assert that there is any thing in the peculiar position of England, which disconnects her interests in any especial manner from those of other nations, such a proposition appears to me radically erroneous. If there is a nation upon earth, whose interests are blended with those of others, that nation is England. The very nature of her power, the very character of her dominion, the complicated structure of her commercial and political superiority, render it inevitable. If Russia sends a fleet through the Dardanelles, or moves a Pulk of Cossacks towards the frontiers of Persia, we are interested. If North America covets Cuba, or coquets with the Canadas, we are interested. If the Burmese King dispatches a troop of predatory horsemen, within two hundred miles of Calcutta, we are interested. If the Emperor of China sends a new set of commercial regulations to the Chief Mandarin of Canton, we are interested. If France intrigues in Belgium, or menaces Italy, we are interested.

England is connected with, not separated from every other nation in the world by that great ocean, which is a part of her Empire.

Nor are we less united with the great European family, by the bonds of moral affinity, sympathy, and opinion, than by the more tangible links of direct national interests. England is not loved on

the Continent, she is not very popular, but “she fills a great space in the eye of mankind.” Our movements are watched with much of involuntary deference, our views, and policy have a great moral weight elsewhere. Nor is this influence all on one side ; we in turn are powerfully acted upon from without. The convulsions which are tearing Europe to its centre, which menace it with a catastrophe similar to the dissolution of the Roman Empire, are the result of an electric shock of opinions, which pervades the atmosphere of thought and feeling from Petersburg to Naples.

We are within its sphere, we must regulate our conduct with reference to its course and effects.

The French Revolution of July last has, indeed, let loose a hurricane in Europe. On its first occurrence it was characterized by so much moderation, and the first movements of the new Government were directed by a Ministry of such temperate, and enlightened principles, that the lovers of constitutional freedom were sanguine in hoping that the change of dynasty would only have secured its mild ascendancy. Those who had had opportunities of becoming acquainted with the French people, hoped much from the changes which circumstances had worked in their national character. They had become less volatile, and more reflecting. A strong principle of justice, and integrity of dealing, marked their transactions. The nation was flourishing, and progressive, property was widely diffused, and a vast

body of commercial and agricultural interests were involved in its preservation. A spirit of industry, and a turn for manufacturing and trading pursuits had been created. The whole nation had a deep, and abhorrent recollection of the dreadful excesses which had stained their first revolution. On the other hand was the absence of those masses of property, that aristocratic mixture, which seems absolutely necessary to give permanence to institutions resembling ours. There was also much exaggeration of feeling, and error on political subjects, and there was the old recollection of the splendid victories of Napoleon, and the thirst for military glory, and conquest, subdued, but not extinguished, by the cultivation of the arts of peace. Still, upon the whole, there appeared fair ground for hope that the tranquillity of Europe, which had subsisted so happily since the fall of Napoleon, would not be troubled, and that the French might consolidate, under a new, a popular, and a prudent Sovereign, that firm, and well balanced limited Monarchy, which our interests, and our sympathies, equally prompted us to desire for them. Nor do I think that, had France been left to herself, these expectations would have been disappointed. During the eight months which have succeeded, the moderate party in the country have shewn that they possessed great strength, and rested upon an imposing mass of public opinion. From the 25th of September last, when they broke up some popular

societies of very dangerous tendencies, to the conclusion of the trial of the Ex Ministers, they always, when roused to action, proved too powerful for the anarchists. But the unfortunate course of events in Europe, the succession of popular movements, that most unlucky Belgic revolution, the Polish revolt, the Italian disturbances, have administered such a succession of excitements to the popular passions, that it is only wonderful how the new, and unstable government of Louis Philippe should have resisted them so long. Republican principles, and intrigues, the mania of an armed crusade of liberalism, the desire of military glory and national aggrandizement, all the chords to which French minds and feelings answer most readily, have been constantly and repeatedly struck. The alarms thus created have given a shock to public credit, and involved the commerce and industry of the country in embarrassment and distress. This state of things has again weakened the power of the State, by depriving it of much of the support of property, as wealth and prosperity are the natural props of Government, while no political adventurers are so desperate and reckless as men of affluent fortunes, suddenly ruined.

It would be doing less than justice to the character and policy of Louis Philippe, since his occupation of the throne, not to remark the evidence he has given of his attachment to moderate and rational principles. He has shewn through-

out a strong preference to the parties of the Centres of the Chamber, in which the best intellect, and integrity of the nation are to be found. He has endeavoured with much skill and address to steer clear of the rocks which shipwrecked the first French revolution, the intoxication of vain and visionary political theories, the intervention of the mob, and the national desire for foreign wars of conquest, and for the propagation by force of arms, like the followers of Mahomet, of the tenets of their political faith. He had the merit, in the case of Belgium, of foregoing a tempting opportunity of territorial acquisition, and of obtaining popularity at home. He probably felt that whatever lighted up a general war in Europe, its course, under any circumstances, would eventually be fatal to himself. Unsuccessful, he would be attacked from without, and overwhelmed by the weight of discontent and disappointment from within. Should the arms of France be triumphant, still he would have to contend with the violence of factions, and the embarrassments of financial difficulties at home, while every student of the Polytechnic School, every Lieutenant of Artillery, would be dreaming of the dazzling course of Napoleon. A whole tide of personal ambition would be let loose, and the first successful General, captivating the imagination of the soldiery and the people, would find it no difficult task to dispossess him of an insecure crown.

Whatever may have been the sincere reluctance

of the French Government to engage in war; whatever may have been the wise and cautious policy of Louis Philippe, rather to reconcile his more liberal institutions with the established monarchies of Europe, than to seek to disturb them; whatever may have been the force of the moderate and constitutional party in France, there is too much reason to fear, that events will be too strong for all these. Should they be overpowered, the issue of these convulsions will be indiscernible by any mortal sagacity. The probability is, that the Continent, after being ravaged by war, and wearied with anarchy, would sink again into the monotonous tranquillity of despotism. The commencement of the struggle would be fatal to all that national prosperity and progressiveness; to all that personal security, liberty, and happiness, for which alone free institutions are precious; the end of it would be the destruction of the forms of freedom themselves.

There is no hostility to the interests of real and rational liberty, in the opinion, that the success of its principles demands the cessation of these popular movements throughout Europe; which, whether repressed, or successful, must finally be injurious to its cause. A British Cabinet should never lose sight of this position; we should never forget, that there is no national object more essential, more intimately mixed up with our domestic welfare, than the allaying this fierce spirit of popular excitement, and the

reconciliation and amicable union of France, and the liberalized States, with the ancient monarchies. We must remember, while we are discussing such extensive changes, at this critical period, in our own Government, that we are a most influential part of this great whole; that we shall act upon Europe, and, in turn, be acted upon by it. If we add a fresh momentum to the popular excitation of the Continent, it will, in turn, give back an additional impulse to our own.

We must first consider, that the carrying of the Reform Bill, as it is hailed as a great victory by all our own radical and republican party here, so it will be trumpeted forth as a triumph by all the democrats and jacobins of the Continent. It will be proclaimed as a proof of the irresistible force of what they call "*le mouvement*;" it will be cited as an evidence, that "*La révolution marche partout*;" and it will be held forth as an example, to stir up the emulation of other nations.

In the next place, it is an impression on the Continent, which has been repeated in their journals for some time past, that the change of Government, produced by this Reform, would greatly weaken the influence of England in the Cabinets of Europe. Most firmly do I believe that it would do so, both immediately, and prospectively; but, at any rate, the mere impression,

to a certain degree, realizes itself. It is curious, that this effect is contemplated with peculiar satisfaction by the most liberal French journals, so much is there of national jealousy in their feelings towards us. It is a singular admission for that party, however, that a large infusion of democracy would weaken the power of the State, and lower its tone towards other nations.

The French have, likewise, since the dethronement of Charles X., been engaged in a Parliamentary Reform. Too much subserviency to the Crown, or a neglect of the popular interests, could not, during the fifteen years which had elapsed since the Restoration, been charged upon the Chamber of Deputies. The variety of little independent parties into which it was divided, their perfect independence, and their extreme violence, impaired the efficiency, and destroyed the stability of each succeeding Ministry; those of the politic De Cazes, and of the enlightened and liberal Martignac, not less than of the Jesuit Villele, and of the Ultra Polignac. Still it was considered, that this assembly was not sufficiently popular in its construction; and after having, by its daring vindication of its own independence, and assertion of the opinions of the people, occasioned, first the Ordinances, and then the Revolution of July; no sooner was that Revolution accomplished, than it became the object of the fiercest attacks of the popular party. It is evident

that this alteration of the elective franchise was entertained with the greatest reluctance by all but the declared Republicans. Not merely the Doctrinaires, M. de Guizot and the Duc de Broglie, but M. M. Laffitte, Sebastiani, and others of the extreme left, broached the subject unwillingly, against their better judgment, and under the compulsion of the popular clamour. A measure was at length provisionally adopted, lowering the qualification from the payment of 300 to 240 francs, direct taxes, and increasing the number of electors from 84,000, to a number, which has been variously stated as from 200,000 to 300,000. It was most apprehensively, and reluctantly passed by all the moderate parties, while it was decried as entirely inadequate by Lafayette, Mauguin, and the extreme left. Any one acquainted with the public mind in France, any one knowing how watchfully they observe all that occurs here, and who can estimate the sensation which the passing of this Reform Bill would have upon them, will at once perceive that it will inevitably lead to their insisting upon a wider basis of elective franchise.

Will they be satisfied with 250,000 electors for their 33,000,000, when they see us adding half a million at a stroke to our already large constituency for a population but two thirds of their number? But, it is certain, that in France, a country wholly destitute of an aristocracy, either of rank or of property, monarchy could not subsist a day concurrent with a widely extended franchise. The two institutions

would come into immediate collision, Republicanism would be established for a time, until replaced by its inevitable successor, absolute power.

I have pointed the attention of my readers to the unquestionable and powerful effect which the passing of this Bill of Reform would produce upon the nations of the continent. Were the spectacle offered to their eyes, of England, under the influence of a popular effervescence, making so vast a stride towards democracy, it would inspire the party of the "mouvement," or, in other words, those who are bent upon keeping up a continued action on the part of the people against all subsisting establishments, with unbounded confidence. It would give them, in reality, a great accession of strength, and, in France, it would lead to a Republican form of Government.

Now let us weigh the re-action of such a state of things upon us ; and let us ask, whether our own monarchy and aristocracy, weakened by this change, would endure very long here against all those internal enemies, which every one must acknowledge they would have to contend with both in England and Ireland, backed by the example and influence of a Republic, probably a Military Republic, on the other side of the Channel. This measure would effect the subversion of two Thrones.

Finally, a vast movement is taking place throughout Europe, originating in a cause, which, at first, commanded our sincere sympathy ; it has extended, in a manner which threatens the whole fabric of society with dissolution : we have felt the rockings

and heavings of the earthquake here. If our well proved institutions have strength to resist the storm, we may be able to check and direct it. The influence of England judiciously and temperately exerted, might do much to calm excitement, to controul the fanaticism of liberalism on one hand, and to mediate between free governments, and absolute monarchy on the other. But if we want that strength now, if, by passing this Bill, we become parties to the movement, we shall be drawn with it in all its subsequent phases. Instead of its being subject to any guidance of ours, we shall become dependent upon it. If the current can be directed towards order, conservative principles, moderation, and settled forms of government, we shall take the lead; in a race of democracy, France will. If, therefore, we find in our internal condition a hundred strong arguments against taking this dangerous step, they derive additional confirmation from without. We are induced to reject the Bill by all our value for the general cause of rational freedom, as we would wish to see it happily, and peacefully consolidated. We are called upon to reject this Bill, as we would not see anarchy invade us from without, even if it were not bred within. We are called upon to reject it by all the pride of patriotism, as we would not see England following in a bad course, instead of leading a good one.

SECTION IX.

CONCLUSION.

I HAVE left almost entirely unnoticed the strong grounds of objection, discoverable by the examination, in detail, of the provisions and clauses of this Bill. It would be almost impossible to introduce so extensive an innovation, which would not, in practice, be found attended with many difficulties and defects, unforeseen by those who framed it. That any great change will be attended with unexpected consequences, is unavoidable; but this Bill seems chargeable with errors, imputable to hurry, and want of arrangement. The distribution of the franchises; the disfranchisement of places of greater opulence and population, than others which are spared; the great deficiency of £10. householders in some of the smaller Boroughs; the large powers reposed in the Privy Council, and the number of Boroughs upon which they will be called to exercise them; the careful provision which has been made for the increase of bribery and corruption, by the creation of so many Penrhyns, and East Retfords, to which all those candidates, who come in now for close Boroughs, must betake themselves;

all these are sufficiently apparent faults, and many of them might have been easily obviated. They are an evidence of the inattention and of the haste with which it has been framed. As several of these defects are exactly of that kind which would attract the strongest animadversion from the radical Reformers, we must conclude that they have some powerful motive in passing them over so silently. It is not indeed difficult to discover. They are charmed with having established the precedent of so vast a change; and it is an additional recommendation to them, that the new system is to be so full of imperfections. Had the Ministry, by some strange chance, produced at once a perfect plan, their occupation would have been gone; but as it is, they would have the fairest possible prospect of continual alteration, mutation, and deterioration.

The very reason which decides them to support the Bill, with all its faults, is the strongest for rejecting it, with every mind alive to a prudent regard for the welfare of the country. The defects are serious objections in themselves; they alone are valid reasons for throwing it out; but when we consider that Ministers bring it forward as a final settlement, that it is upon that ground solely that they can be entitled to ask the House to receive it, surely all these flaws and blunders must entirely deprive it of that character. In this light, objections of detail assume a tenfold importance.

Every blunder, every oversight, every sin of omis-

sion, or of commission, however trifling, introduces an element of instability, a ground of future cavil, or of future modification, into what, if it be received at all, ought to be received with every guarantee of its being a final adjustment.

We are now fast approaching those later stages, which will determine the fate of this measure, and with it that of the British nation. Some observations which I have made upon the circumstances attending its earlier progress, induce me to address one short remark to those, who, viewing it as I do, as most dangerous and subversive in its character, have voted from deference to the popular feeling, in opposition to the dictates of their own better judgment. Let them remember, that this step is irrevocable; they wish to act with caution, but caution can have nothing in common with it. The reckless and blind temerity which brought it forward, or the still more alarming designs of many who support it, cannot be defeated by temporizing movements. Let those, who think that this is “ *the axe, and not the pruning knife,*” abandon the vain expectation, that they can direct the edge, or regulate the descent of this improper, clumsy, fatal instrument. They must arrest the uplifted arm that has madly raised it; there is destruction in its fall. The mortal blow would be given to the constitution, and to social order; the rest would be but the protracted struggle of lingering dissolution. If there be danger in the bolder, franker line, it is

a danger less in degree, and not so formidable in kind.

- “ Let him who crawls, enamoured of decay,
- “ Cling to his couch, and sicken years away;
- “ Heave his thick breath, and shake his palsied head,
- “ Ours the fresh turf, and not the feverish bed.”

But let them be assured, that the more decided is the safer course. Let them do their duty, undeterred by that popular feeling, which is evanescent, which is mistaken; and which will, in the end, acknowledge its error, and subscribe to the decisions of justice and reason. Let them confront this menacing axe, as they value our prosperity, our place among nations, the prospects of our children. Let them oppose this Bill, as they would be faithful to their charge, true to their country, just to posterity; as they would answer it, in their last hour, to their conscience, and their God.

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